

# The new medicine man

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# The new medicine man

by **ANDREW  
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**BOB WILLIAMSON** is going out on a limb. As chief executive of the American-owned Stirling Winthrop Group — parent of Phillips Scot and Turner, makers of Andrews Liver Salts, Milk of Magnesia, Big S, Shift oven cleaner, and Sona—he intends to 'consolidate our position in the family medicine field and not to bother too much with household products.' All around him, firms selling non-durable consumer goods are licking their lips at the fast-expanding grocery market. 'Not to bother' with grocery products sounds like sacrilege.

Williamson is also virtually abandoning the use of brand managers. Since the war, one of the most obvious trends in business organisation has been the emergence of men responsible for all aspects of a product—from its inception to the final sale to the consumer. The 'brand or product manager' has penetrated successful giants like Procter and Gamble, Unilever, Colgate, Palmolive, and Beechams.

Phillips Scot and Turner adopted the principle with gusto. Under the



**Bob Williamson : Out on a limb.**

direction of 41-year-old Eric Morgan, an ex-Procter and Gamble man, PST built up a sizeable marketing team which tried to emulate the techniques of the giants. Last week, Williamson, one-time rival of Morgan and the same age, formally announced a major reorganisation at PST. A day earlier, Morgan became a senior executive of British American Tobacco.

Williamson finds it 'difficult, intellectually and from a business point of view, to accept the brand management philosophy.' He believes also that there will soon be a trend away from brand management. 'If you preach the policy of brand manage-

ment, then you can expect a rapid staff turnover and so lose the historical perspective that is vitally important to a brand.'

Such a view is clearly in conflict with that of many brand men, trained to tackle any product. Since Williamson made his views abundantly clear, five brand assistants, two brand managers, a marketing and a managing director have vanished from the scene. Few of them have found it hard to get other jobs. PST marketing men have been snapped up by growth-hungry companies such as Beechams, Petfoods, Lyons, Glaxo, Typhoo, Bovril and Cerebos.

One ex-PST man, now with a

major advertising agency, feels that the issues are very simple. 'Basically there was disbelief that advertising worked as a way of promoting drugs. I had to rewrite a brand plan, for example, seven or eight times and ended up trying to prove that advertising works.'

Williamson agrees that he is not convinced that television is the best medium for promoting medicine. 'If a product is capable of demonstration then TV is useful. But why use it if you can do it in cold print? People want to read about these things.'

It was on issues such as these that Morgan and Williamson came to a head-on clash. Morgan, brought up on the concept of heavy television promotion for products, saw the red light. He soon disagreed with 'the way research, public relations and personnel plans were organised.' But most of all he disagreed with the move away from grocery sales. Everywhere, PST rivals were heading for this area as fast as they could.

Morgan undeniably built turnover for PST (1960 sales of £3 million, 1966 £6 million), but profits do not appear to have sparkled. Big S almost certainly lost money, while Shift, which hit sales over £1 million, made only a small profit. Yet Morgan's philosophy might have paid off.

'I thought my brief was to go for a fast expansion,' says Morgan, and a senior marketing executive who has since left PST adds 'somewhere, someone changed their minds. I think the United States management took an interest too late in the day. When they woke up to the divergence between practice and philosophy they realised that they must do something about it.'

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